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TO ALL EUROPEAN DIPLOMATIC POSTS

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, XH, XT

SUBJECT:BALKAN CONFERENCE -- A MODEST BEGINNING

1. FOLLOWING IS DEPARTMENT'S ASSESSMENT OF THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED BALKAN CONFERENCE AND GUIDANCE ON RELATED US POLICY.

2. THE FIRST INTER-BALKAN CONFERENCE ON ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL COLLABORATION, ATTENDED BY EXPERTS FROM BULGARIA, GREECE, ROMANIA, TURKEY, AND YUGOSLAVIA CONCLUDED IN ATHENS ON FEBRUARY 5 AFTER ELEVEN DAYS OF DELIBERATION. PARTICIPANTS GENERALLY AGREED THAT A POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE CHARACTERIZED THE SESSIONS AND THAT THE CONFERENCE CONTRIBUTED TO THE "SPIRIT OF HELSINKI." ALTHOUGH SHORT ON CONCRETE RESULTS, THE CONFERENCE FULFILLED THE MODEST INVESTIGATORY PURPOSE SUGGESTED BY ITS INITIATOR, GREEK
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PREMIER KARAMANLIS. WHILE GREECE, ROMANIA AND YUGOSLAVIA DISPLAYED PRONOUNCED WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE, THE MEETING WAS MARRED BY RECURRENT INSTANCES OF RECALCITRANCE ON THE PART OF BULGARIA, WHICH SEEMED TO ACT UNDER SOVIET INSTRUCTIONS.

3. LIST OF PROJECTS REFERRED TO GOVERNMENTS. ACCORDING TO THE FINAL COMMUNIQUE, THE CONFERENCE IDENTIFIED SIX SECTORS -- AGRICULTURE, COMMERCE, ENERGY, TRANSPORT, COMMUNICATIONS AND ENVIRONMENT -- DEEMED SUITABLE FOR MULTILATERAL COLLABORATION. A LIST OF 154 PROPOSALS ADVANCED BY THE PARTICIPANTS WILL BE REFERRED TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES FOR REVIEW AND SELECTION OF THOSE THAT ARE ACCEPTABLE. AMONG THE PROPOSALS MENTIONED WAS AN INTER-BALKAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (BY GREECE), A BALKAN BANK CONSORTIUM (BY YUGOSLAVIA), A VETERINARY CONVENTION, AND OIL AND NATURAL GAS PIPELINE SYSTEMS. THE FLOOD OF PROPOSALS IS SURPRISING AND SUGGESTS AN IMPROVED CLIMATE IN THE BALKANS AND A DESIRE FOR MORE COLLABORATION.

4. BULGARIAN FOOT-DRAGGING. AN UNEXPECTED FEATURE OF THE CONFERENCE WAS THE REPORTEDLY "VERY NEGATIVE AND INFLEXIBLE" POSTURE OF THE BULGARIANS. IN CONTRAST, THE ROMANIANS AND, TO A SLIGHTLY LESSER EXTENT, THE YUGOSLAVS AND GREEKS APPEARED HIGHLY MOTIVATED, AND ON A NUMBER OF POINTS TRIED TO PUSH COLLABORATION BEYOND THE AGREED LIMITED PERIMETER OF THE CONFERENCE. THE TURKS, DESPITE AN INITIAL CAUTIOUS AND LUKEWARM APPROACH, WERE PRAISED BY THE GREEKS FOR THEIR COOPERATIVENESS AND CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE, AND THEY GENERALLY ALIGNED THEMSELVES WITH THE ROMANIANS, YUGOSLAVS, AND GREEKS.

5. THE BULGARIANS CLASHED WITH THE ROMANIANS WHEN THE LATTER RAISED THEIR LONG-STANDING PET PROJECT OF TURNING THE BALKANS INTO A "ZONE OF PEACE," WHICH UNEXPECTEDLY INJECTED POLITICS INTO A SUPPOSEDLY "NONPOLITICAL" CONFERENCE. BULGARIAN OBSTRUCTIONISM EMERGED FROM THE START ON A NUMBER OF ISSUES:

--THEY EMASCULATED AND DELAYED ADOPTION OF THE RULES
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OF PROCEDURE UNTIL THE LAST DAYS OF THE CONFERENCE;

--THEY ABORTED INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE CONFERENCE (ESPECIALLY FAVORED BY THE ROMANIANS) BY THE FORMATION OF PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEES IN EACH OF THE SPECIFIED AREAS OF COLLABORATION. (THE SECRETARIAT OF THE CONFERENCE AND OTHER WORKING BODIES WERE

DISSOLVED AFTER THE MEETING.);

--THEY WOULD NOT AGREE TO A FORMAL NAME FOR THE ATHENS MEETING AND OBJECTED TO THE TERM "INTER-BALKAN COOPERATION" (WHICH WAS OMITTED IN THE FINAL COMMUNIQUE) AND SUGGESTED "COOPERATION AMONG BALKAN STATES";

--THEY REJECTED THE SUGGESTION THAT, IN THE INTEREST OF "CONTINUITY," A SPECIFIC DATE BE SET FOR THE NEXT CONFERENCE;

--THEY INSISTED THAT THE LIST OF PROJECTS BE REFERRED BACK TO THEIR RESPECTIVE GOVERNMENTS FOR STUDY AND APPROVAL, ARGUING THAT THE CONFERENCE HAD NOT BEEN DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO APPROVE ANY PROJECTS; AND

--THEY WERE UPSET BY THE EXTENSIVE MEDIA COVERAGE (PRESUMABLY IN YUGOSLAVIA, GREECE, AND ROMANIA), WHILE BULGARIAN MEDIA PAID LITTLE ATTENTION TO THE CONFERENCE.

6. SOVIET HAND APPARENT. BULGARIAN OBSTREPEROUSNESS APPEARS ATTRIBUTABLE MAINLY, IF NOT SOLELY, TO THE HEAVY HAND OF THE SOVIETS. LAST JULY BULGARIAN BOSS TODOR ZHIVKOV APPEARED TO BE EAGER TO SUPPORT KARAMANLIS' INITIATIVE, AND THEIR JOINT COMMUNIQUE WENT AS FAR AS TO SUGGEST THAT THE FIRST MEETING BE AT THE FULL MINISTERIAL LEVEL. GIVEN BULGARIA'S TRADITIONAL OBSEQUIOUSNESS TO MOSCOW'S WISHES, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT SOVIET INITIAL APPROVAL HAD TURNED INTO CONCERN THAT THE CONFERENCE WAS SOMETHING THAT THEY COULD NOT CONTROL AND THEREFORE SHOULD

OPPOSE. THE SPECTRE OF BULGARIA, THEIR LAST TRUE SATELLITE IN THE BALKANS, GOING THE WAY OF YUGOSLAVIA, CONFIDENTIAL

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ALBANIA, AND ROMANIA MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN ON THEIR MIND. IN ANY CASE, THE BULGARIAN DELEGATION EVIDENTLY CAME TO THE CONFERENCE WITH INSTRUCTIONS TO DRAG THEIR FEET AND NOT TO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO ANY PROPOSAL.

7. WHETHER THE SOVIETS CAN SUCCEED IN WRECKING THE NASCENT GROUPING REMAINS TO BE SEEN. THE OUTCOME COULD BE SOFIA'S ISOLATION IN THE AREA, AND IT MIGHT BE MATERIALIZING: ON FEBRUARY 2, THREE DAYS BEFORE THE CONFERENCE ENDED, IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT THE GREEKS, YUGOSLAVS, AND ROMANIANS WOULD MEET IN ATHENS IN MARCH FOR TECHNICAL TALKS ON INDUSTRIAL COLLABORATION. IT COULD BE THAT THE YUGOSLAVS AND ROMANIANS, POSSIBLY OACKED BY THE GREEKS, HOPE FOR A SORT OF LOOSE "CONCERT" TO FEND

OFF PRESSURES FROM THE EAST.

8. SOVIET RESORT TO SURROGATES. THE SOVIETS MAY BE RESORTING TO THE STRATEGEM OF FOISTING OTHER SURROGATES ON THE CONFERENCE IN AN EFFORT TO GAIN INFLUENCE OVER IT. HUNGARIAN DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER NAGY -- WHILE VISITING ATHENS IN OCTOBER -- EXPRESSED HUNGARY'S INTEREST IN KARAMANLIS' INITIATIVE ;AS A NEIGHBOR OF MANY BALKAN COUNTRIES". KARAMANLIS REPORTEDLY REJECTED HUNGARY'S EFFORT, ALTHOUGH THE QUESTION DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN FINALLY SETTLED. GREEK FOREIGN MINISTER BITSIOS EXPECTED TO HAVE THE ISSUE RAISED AGAIN DURING HIS VISIT TO BUDAPEST IN FEBRUARY. IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT HUNGARY COULD

EVENTUALLY BE ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE AS A VOTELESS OBSERVER IN ADDITION, THE BULGARIANS HAVE ALLEGEDLY TWICE PUT FORWARD THE SUGGESTION OF THE PARTICIPATION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA (THE ONLY SOVIET SATELLITE TO COMMENT ON THE CONFERENCE) AND POLAND -- AN APPARENT EFFORT TO "PACK" THE CONFERENCE WITH PRO-SOVIET MEMBERS.

9. THE GAMBIT, HOWEVER, STANDS LITTLE CHANCE OF SUCCESS. THE YUGOSLAVS FOR ONE -- WHILE INDICATING THAT COLLABORATION DOES NOT MEAN A "SHUT-IN OR ISOLATED GROUP" AND "IS NOT AIMED AGAINST ANYONE" -- HAVE EMPHASIZED THAT COLLABORATION "CAN OFFER EXPECTED RESULTS ONLY IF IT IS LIMITED SOLELY TO THE BALKAN COUNTRIES" AND IT "MUST CONFIDENTIAL

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SERVE THE INTEREST OF THE BALKAN COUNTRIES ALONE." THEY HAVE ALSO HELD THAT COOPERATION "CANNOT BE MADE DEPENDENT ON THE POLICIES OR STRATEGIES OF NON-BALKAN FACTORS," AND THAT "IN BALKAN DISCUSSIONS THE US AND USSR MUST NOT BE INVOLVED." THESE SENTIMENTS ARE LIKELY TO BE SHARED BY FOUR OF THE FIVE PARTICIPANTS.

10. OUTLOOK. IT IS UP TO THE FIVE BALKAN GOVERNMENTS TO DECIDE WHEN THE NEXT MEETING WILL TAKE PLACE, POSSIBLY AT THE FULL MINISTERIAL LEVEL. ALTHOUGH NOT FORMALLY DELEGATED TO DO SO BY THE CONFERENCE, THE GREEK GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO CARRY THE INITIATIVE FOR THE NEXT CONFERENCE, WHICH THE GREEKS EXPECT TO TAKE PLACE AFTER "AT LEAST SIX MONTHS." THE YUGOSLAVS HAVE INDICATED THAT THE MAJORITY OF THE DELEGATION HEADS HOPE THAT IT WILL TAKE PLACE "SOON." ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ROMANIANS -- APPARENTLY DISAPPOINTED IN SOME OF THEIR EXPECTATIONS -- NOW MAINTAIN THAT BECAUSE OF THE COMPLEXITY OF THE TASK OF SORTING OUT THE PROPOSALS THE NEXT MEETING MAY NOT TAKE PLACE THIS YEAR.

11. THE GREEKS HAVE BEEN DELEGATED TO BRIEF THE ALBANIAN GOVERNMENT ON THE CONFERENCE'S PROCEEDINGS AND WILL RENEW THE PROPOSAL THAT THE ALBANIANS PARTICIPATE IN THE NEXT MEETING. SHOULD THE CONFERENCE RE-CONVENE IT IS LIKELY TO PRODUCE MORE RESULTS OF A CONCRETE NATURE, IF FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN TO AVOID FAILURE.

12. U.S. POLICY. WE SEE NO ADVANTAGE IN VOLUNTEERING DETAILED VIEWS AND ANALYSIS OF THE BALKAN CONFERENCE OR, AT THIS STAGE, IN INVOLVING OURSELVES IN ANY WAY IN ITS ACTIVITIES. ON APPROPRIATE OCCASIONS, HOWEVER, WE MAY STATE THAT WE WELCOME THIS FIRST STEP TOWARDS COOPERATION ON A REGIONAL BASIS AMONG THE BALKAN COUNTRIES. INGERSOLL

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